

OF THE UNITED STATES

THE CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

Compiled from History by DEAN HODGES, of Cambridge.

CHRISTIANITY came to America in two forms, the earlier form being the Church of Rome and the latter the Church of England. For convenience the two may be designated as the Latin and the English.

Latin Christianity was prompt to follow in the wake of Columbus, being preached in Mexico and the far South-west in the earliest days by missionaries from Spain, and in Canada and the Northwest by missionaries from France. These pioneers have never surpassed for courage, self-sacrifice and enthusiastic devotion, and they have never been equalled in their understanding of the Indian character and in their success in making Indian converts.

The history of Europe is closely bound to the colonization of America. From the national ascendancy in the old country, the aggressive colonization and spread of the church in the new world followed the footsteps of the established churches of these countries. From the time of the Armada, England was in the ascendancy, both in Europe and America, and Latin Christianity gave way in the colonies to the preaching of the Church of England, as pointed out by Dean Hodges, of Cambridge, in his book, from which much of the data in this article is obtained.

For Three Centuries.

English Christianity has existed in America for three centuries, the English Church being from the first almost as divided as it is to-day. On one side were those who retained the rule of the bishops and the use of the prayer-book, and on the other side, those who for various reasons have discontinued these usages. The English Church came first in the Episcopal form, and settled in the first English civilization at Jamestown in 1607.

The non-Episcopal and non-liturgical form of Puritanism, equally English, followed thirteen years later and founded their civilization at Plymouth. The first prayers in English in America were in the words of the Episcopal prayer-book, preceding by twenty or more years the first English service in the Atlantic states. Twice before the defeat of the Armada, in 1585 English ships anchored in American harbors, and their chaplains read the service of the Church of England on these shores. On the Pacific shore Francis Fletcher, of Drake's ship, the Pelican, read English service. A stone cross in Golden Gate Park commemorates this spot. A little later, on the Atlantic side, Thomas Hariot made a declaration of the contents of the Bible to the Indians on Roanoke Island, and in 1607, the sacrament of baptism in the English Church was for the first time administered on American soil. Manteo, the first Indian convert, and John Dare, the first child born of English parents in America, being received into the church.

At the Roanoke Island settlement a stone cross was erected on Monhegan Island, off the Maine coast, by Sir George Weymouth to show to the Christian men had landed there. On August 9, 1607, an expedition landed on this island, and Richard Seymour read morning prayer under the starry sky of the cross. This is the first English service on New England soil of which there is definite record, and the colony was soon afterward abandoned.

But before this, on May 18th of 1607, Robert Hunt held services at the Jamestown colony in Virginia. Episcopal services have been held since without interruption on Virginia soil.

The Jamestown Colony.

The Jamestown colony, under the leadership of Newport, landed on the island on Wednesday. On Thursday they began the erection of a fort, a three-cornered structure with a bastion at each angle. They prepared for Sunday by hanging up an old sail, fastening it to three or four trees to shelter the congregation from the sun and rain. Seats of logs and an improvised pulpit were erected between two trees. The service of the day was that for the first Sunday after Ascension beginning, "The end of all things is at hand," no doubt seeming a possible prophecy to the lonely colonists.

Smith's diary tells in detail of the erection of the first church, "a homely thing like a barn, set upon crutches, four houses being for the most part farre more workmanship."

Smith continues, "We held daily Common Prayer, morning and evening, every Sunday, two winters, and every three months the Holy Communion." The affairs of that early colony were closely interwoven with their church, and there was no broken wilderness, surrounded by an unmapped forest and numberless savages and wild beasts, every day begun and ended with the reading of the prayers of the Church of England. The first celebration of Holy Communion was on the 21st day of June, the third Sunday after Trinity.

With various vicissitudes and under difficulties from dissensions within and danger from savages without, the colony gradually grew and spread its wings over Eastern Virginia, other ministers coming out.

Was Notable Year.

The year 1619 was a notable one in the colony, the number of English colonists having reached about 1,000. In that year was completed a new church, a wooden structure fifty feet long and twenty feet wide. In May also came a Dutch ship having for sale a cargo of twenty negroes, the first negro slaves on the American Continent. The year 1619 is still more notable, since in that year were elected and met the first House of Burgesses, its sessions being held in the Jamestown Church. This body may claim to be the first elective legislative body in the world, the English House of Commons at that time not being a truly elective body.

Laws were passed in the Jamestown Church against idleness, gambling, drunkenness and toxic inapparel. Plans were made for the education of the children "in the true religion," by way of preparation for "the college which was intended for them."

All ministers were instructed to make annual report of christenings, burials and marriages. They were instructed to read divine service according to the ritual of the Church of England. The people were instructed to attend the services under penalty, and all such as bore arms were to bring their "pieces, swords, powder and shotte." The Governor of the colony sat in the chancel, the

question of the open pulpit not having been agitated at that time.

The brick church, at Jamestown, whose tower remains, was erected in 1639, and was fifty-six feet long and twenty-eight feet wide.

In 1622 a university was projected at Henricopolis, at the falls of the James, but a sudden Indian massacre put a stop to the undertaking. The Archbishop of Canterbury contributed 1,500 pounds to the college. The Bishop of London, under whose jurisdiction the church in America was founded, gave another thousand pounds, and Mr. George Thorpe came over to be the first tutor of the university. He had hardly arrived when the savages attacked the colony, and he was killed.

Other Colonies.

As the years went on other colonies of English settled in America, the Puritans at Plymouth in 1620, and other colonies over New England. The church in America labored under the disadvantages of having no resident bishop. From Jamestown to the Declaration of Independence no bishop of the church in America existed, and petition after petition was sent for a complete organization of the church in America. With no bishop there was no one to ordain new ministers, and a minister could only be ordained by taking the perilous, tedious and expensive journey to London, and, accordingly, the number of clergy was small. Similarly no one could be confirmed, and many de facto members of the colonial churches, as for instance, General Washington, served as laymen, without being confirmed members of the church.

With the overthrow of Charles I. in England, there came a great exodus of churchmen to Virginia, in Massachusetts and Connecticut the colonies were puritanical and congregational. Rhode Island and the Quakers. Except in Virginia and Maryland, churchmen made up a small part of the population, and the refusal of many Tory high churchmen in the days of the Protectorate.

System of Commissioners.

Beginning in 1680 was instituted the system of commissioners, the Bishop of London appointing his representative in the Colonies, to exercise such discipline as was possible under the circumstances. Mr. James Blair, Mr. Blair, a most untiring and able figure of Colonial days, found on his coming seventy places of worship in the Colonies under the administration of the Bishop of London, half of them provided with ordained ministers, and the others with lay readers. Blair and Mary at Williamsburg, his successor, Rev. Thomas Bray, commissary of the Bishop of London for Maryland, went back to England and founded the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in 1701.

The first missionaries of the "S. P. G." George Keith and John Talbot, made a general visitation of the Colonies. They found fifty clergymen of the Church of England in this country, of whom seventeen were in Maryland and twenty-five in Virginia. Outside of Virginia and Maryland there were four church buildings—St. Philip's in Charleston, S. C. (1682); King's Chapel, in Boston (1689); Christ Church, in Philadelphia (1696); and Trinity Church, in New York (1697).

The agents of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel gave an immediate impulse to the Colonial Church. Wherever they went congregations were assembled, old parishes were revived, and new ones were organized, and churches built. Trinity Church, in Newport, in 1702; St. Paul's, in Kingston, in 1707; St. Michael's, in Bristol, in 1719; and St. John's, in Providence, in 1725 are marks of the work of these missionaries in Rhode Island alone.

In Boston to King's Chapel was added Christ Church, in 1735; St. Mary's appeared in Burlington, N. J., in 1703, and was advocated as a good central seat for a bishop of all America.

Remarkable Events.

The most remarkable events of the pre-Revolutionary period were the visits of Dean Berkeley, in 1726, and missions of John Wesley and George Whitfield in Savannah and throughout the South.

The ship which carried Wesley back to begin the great revival in England, which proved the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church, passed in mid-ocean the ship which was bringing Whitfield to America, to begin what was known as the "Great Awakening" of the church in this country.

The American Revolution divides the history of the church into two almost equal parts. With the Declaration of Independence, the first came sharply to an end. Many of the clergy and some of the laity were English bred and born, and Tories to the last. Many of the clergy went back to England, no church in America suffering so much through the period of war and the construction of a new church in America, as the branch of the Church of England.

Among the prominent leaders in the Revolution, however, many were ardent churchmen, among whom may be mentioned George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, both the Lees, Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, who though hardly orthodox, is usually counted; Robert Morris, John Jay, James Madison and many others.

Ten Years of Chaos.

The period of the Revolution was an interregnum, a ten years of chaos and disorder in the church, from which there seemed to be no outlook.

In 1781 a council of the churches in Virginia met in the State Capitol in Richmond and organized the Diocese of Virginia. Bishop Griffith was elected to preside, and became de facto bishop of the diocese. Since there was no bishop in this country to consecrate him, his position of first bishop of the diocese has always been questioned, although for five years he exercised episcopal authority in No

diocese. He was succeeded in 1790 by Bishop Madison.

The first steps taken to a general convention were taken at a conference in New York in October, 1874, when eight States were represented. This conference had no authority to legislate, but they approved a schedule of "fundamental principles," drawn up by President White, of the University of Pennsylvania, and called a General Convention to meet in Philadelphia September 27, 1878. On that date in Christ Church the first General Convention met. It was composed largely of deputies from Virginia and Maryland, there being sixteen clergymen present, and twenty-four laymen. No representatives came from New England, the church there standing aloof, and inviting the States to attend a general convention to meet in Connecticut for the purpose of organizing a separate church. Dr. White was chosen to preside. A committee was appointed to report a constitution, a revision of the Book of Common Prayer, and a plan for the consecration of bishops. The committee began their work on Tuesday. On Saturday they reported a constitution and a prayer book, and on the following Tuesday the convention adopted the constitution. On Wednesday they ordered the new prayer book to be printed. Meanwhile they had adopted a plan for the consecration of bishops, and on Friday they adjourned after a session of ten days. For legislative bodies have accomplished so much in such a space of time. Pennsylvania elected White as bishop, Maryland chose Smith, Griffith was elected by Virginia and Provost by New York. Smith declined the journey to England, so White and Provost went, and on Sunday, February 1, 1879, were consecrated at Lambeth Palace by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Dr. White taking rank as the first bishop of the American church.

Fell Upon Evil Days.

The organization once perfected, the church fell upon evil days. The revolution was followed in all religious bodies by a period of anarchy, the reaction from the great awakening having been followed by the French Revolution and French infidelity was in the ascendancy. Tom Paine and his school of atheists and skeptics were followed, and the churches were emptied and fell into decay. All denominations felt the decline in spirituality in the year 1788 the Methodists lost 4,000 members. The General Convention of 1800 had only seven dioceses represented, the House of Bishops two in number, met in a hall bedroom of the rectory of St. Paul's Church, Baltimore. In 1811 at the Church College of William and Mary, students held public debates as to "whether Christianity had been injurious or beneficial to mankind."

With the War of 1812 came the revival. The evangelical movement following the War of 1812 was felt in all the churches, and nowhere it more marked than in Richmond, where the Broad Street Methodist and the First Presbyterian churches were all built within a few years of each other in the same neighborhood.

It was at this time that the Sunday-school came into use, the invention of Robert Raikes, in England, who instituted a system by which, presently there were a generation of men and women who had been systematically taught the Christian religion. In England the Church of England Missionary Society was started, appealing at first to a church half-indifferent and half-skeptical, and finally encircling the globe with its agents.

A year later a little band of students at Williams College, Massachusetts, held a prayer meeting in the hall of a haystack, and devoted themselves to foreign mission work. These men compelled the formation of the foremost mission organization of the country, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Andover Theological Seminary, was established in that year for the training of young ministers.

In 1819 the General Theological Seminary was opened in New York, with two professors and six students. In 1823 the Virginia Theological Seminary was founded at Alexandria, Bishop Moore, of Virginia, being its foster-father.

Development of West.

The period up to and following the War between the States is largely the history of the development of the great West. Diocese after diocese was added to the General Convention as the territory became settled, and the borders of civilization pushed further and further to the westward, and always the church has maintained an outpost guard of picked men who prepared for the coming of a church organization.

The contest between the States was one of perplexity to churchmen, and there were called upon to take an active stand for one side or the other. Bishop McVane, of Ohio, was one of those appointed by President Lincoln to go to England with Archbishop Hughes, Henry Ward Beecher and Thurlow Weed to induce the English government not to recognize the Confederacy. Bishop Polk, of Louisiana, answered the call of President Davis, and became a general in the Confederate Army. McVane and Polk had been close friends since Polk was a chaplain at West Point and McVane was chaplain there. The larger number of conspicuous churchmen in the war were on the Southern side. Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, was a churchman. Robert L. Lee was a vestryman in the church, and both held high positions in the Church throughout the war.

The Southern dioceses followed the Southern States in secession, and met in convention in 1861 and adopted a constitution and canon. But in 1862, when the General Convention met in New York, the roll-call began as always, with Alabama, the church recognizing no partition. The Southern Dioceses returned as their States came back into the Union, having been sent from but one General Convention. Theological and social problems have taken up much of the thought of the church since the war, while the extending West has silently grown from one ocean to the other. The institutional church came in with the accentuation of the general doctrine of the brotherhood of man, with ever a wider and wider view of a series of missions extending around the world, prophetic of a world-wide church and a world-wide Christianity.

